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REVIEWS AND NOTICES

Mythical Bards and the Life of William Wallace. By WILLIAM HENRY SCHOFIELD. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1920. (Harvard Studies in Comparative Literature, Vol. V.) Pp. xii+381.

Mythical Bards and the Life of William Wallace, by the late Professor William Henry Schofield, of Harvard University, is the outcome of studies designed to lay the foundation for a *History of English Literature from Chaucer to Elizabeth*, which the author planned as a continuation of his *English Literature from the Norman Conquest to Chaucer*.

Professor Schofield's book deals primarily with the problem of Blind Harry and the well-known fifteenth-century *Life of William Wallace*, so long attributed to him. After reviewing previous critical opinion, the author states his general conclusions as follows:

I assume that the author of the *Wallace* was called Blind Harry; but I believe that he was not a minstrel at all in the ordinary acceptance of the term, and that he was never blind. I venture to hold that Blind Harry was only the author's pseudonym, and I shall try to establish the existence in myth and show the nature of the strange personage who has always been treated as the author of the work [pp. 12 f.].

While accepting John Major's evidence that at the end of the first quarter of the sixteenth century the *Wallace* was attributed to a poet called Blind Harry, Professor Schofield believes that the name Blind Harry—like Blind Homer, Blind Tiresias, and Blind Ossian—is the work of traditional mythopoeic imagination. In an interlude written by Dunbar about 1500 a dwarf calls himself "Blynd Hary, That lang has bene in the Fary, Farleis to fynd," and asserts that he is descended from the Ossianic heroes Fyn Mac Kowle and Gow Mackmorne—facts which, taken in connection with a large body of evidence from popular tradition, indicate to Professor Schofield that by the beginning of the sixteenth century the Wallace-poet was regarded as a seer who, like Ossian, Thomas Rhymer, and other mythical personages, had derived supernatural knowledge from a sojourn in the other world and who had been punished with blindness for some breach of supernatural law.

"To all intents and purposes the *Wallace* is an anonymous book" (p. 116). A study of the content of the poem shows that the author, far from being an itinerant bard *a nativitate luminibus captus . . . qui historicarum recitatione coram principibus victum et vestitum quo dignus erat nactus est* (cf. *Mythical Bards*, p. 291, note), was a clever, self-conscious artist who was fond

of imitating Chaucer and who aimed at literary display (p. 126). In order to induce his readers the more willingly to accept the fictions in which he clothes the figure of William Wallace, he uses devices which suggest those adopted by the author of *Sir John Mandeville's Travels* and "that arch-impostor of the Middle Ages, Geoffrey of Monmouth . . . who with similar humility asserted his reliance solely on a mysterious book which he alone was privileged to possess, and with similar anxiety protested the soothfastness of his account, though it might not tally wholly with the information obtainable from other sources" (p. 118). Writing about 1483, when Scottish indignation against England ran high, the Wallace-poet was intent upon fomenting strife, and to this end he chose as his theme the exploits of a national hero who had valiantly opposed the Southron and, as a mouthpiece, a bard who, like Ossian and Billie Blin, alias Odin, had loved enmity and discord (p. 160). He was neither a quiet scholar nor an amicable, chivalric ecclesiastic, like Barbour, with whom he has been compared, but "a vigorous propagandist, a ferocious *realpolitiker*, without principle when it was a question of Scotland's place in the sun, without reluctance to lie in manipulating history to his own end" (p. 146). The worthy French clerk, "Master Blair," whose "Latin book" the poet explicitly mentions as his principal authority, is comparable to Chaucer's Lollius, and may be an echo of Master Blaise, the fictitious recorder of the deeds of Merlin (p. 176). Professor Schofield's book deserves well of the republic of letters for having dispelled once for all the fog of guesswork and pseudo-scholarship by which the real *Wallace* has so long been hidden.

But *Mythical Bards* is far more than a careful study of an oft-misinterpreted Middle Scots poem. The author brings a large number of Celtic and Scandinavian documents to bear on the solution of problems in early Scottish literature, and his conclusions point the way to much-needed investigations in this field (cf. p. 163). The vexed Homeric problem appears less complicated when viewed in connection with the fabled writer of the *Wallace* and with other "blind" poets. By collecting a large amount of material dealing with primitive conceptions regarding the source of poetic inspiration, the author throws a flood of light on early attempts to solve the riddle of genius and on ancient critical theories of its origin and scope.¹ In general, *Mythical Bards* is marked by the broad scholarship and the keen vision of literary problems which have always been the chief characteristics of the author's work.

By Professor Schofield's death scholarship has suffered an irreparable loss. Few teachers have ever presented the literary treasures of the Middle

¹ How much early assertions regarding Homer and the bards, scalds, and minstrels of the Middle Ages influenced conceptions of "original genius" and "nature poetry" during the Romantic period, the writer of this review hopes to show at an early date. Professor Schofield's study forms an indispensable background for the study of this and other important problems in Romanticism.

Ages in a fashion more likely to catch the ear of the modern world. Yet, in spite of the growing tendency in education to discredit the value of research, Professor Schofield never lost sight of the high and holy aim of learning. The inspiration of his work has been felt by men who never sat under his instruction. By those who have studied under him he will ever be remembered as a stimulating teacher and a genuinely disinterested and sympathetic friend.

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Old and New, Sundry Papers. By C. H. GRANDGENT. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1920. Pp. 177.

Old and New, Sundry Papers, is the title of a volume containing eight essays and addresses by Professor C. H. Grandgent, of Harvard University. Though covering a rather wide range of subjects, the papers included "have this in common, that they treat, in general, of changes in fashion, especially in matters of speech and of school" (Preface).

"Fashion and the Broad A," "The Dog's Letter," and "New England Pronunciation" are scholarly yet delightful essays on subjects which should interest every student of language. If there were more philologists like Professor Grandgent, Mr. H. L. Mencken would have less occasion to complain that American college professors investigate forgotten dialects to the neglect of living English. In "Numeric Reform in Nesciubia" the author by the use of a parable seeks to convince a recalcitrant and osteocephalic generation that the current mode of spelling should be changed for one less hampered by tradition. In "School" and in the address on the teaching of modern languages he demonstrates with irresistible logic that the shortcomings of modern education are largely attributable to inadequately trained teachers, lax standards of instruction, "easy" substitutes for the old humanistic curriculum, and other features of the new "democratic" movement.

"Nor Yet the New" should be read in connection with "The Dark Ages," which was listened to with such keen pleasure by the members of the Modern Language Association a few years ago. In these two papers Professor Grandgent points out how much the Modernists have lost by attempting to cut themselves off from the past. In pictorial and literary art, in education, and even in morality "the insurgent attitude has now become a pose." Professor Grandgent believes that the whole Modernist educational propaganda "is based on the false assumption that knowledge can be acquired without painfully conscious effort, if we but pick out alluring kinds of knowledge," and that its greatest danger "lies in its coincidence with the innate laziness of man." With honest seekers after truth in the field of